

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

In the secluded and picturesque manorial house of Burwains, nestled beneath the protective shelter of a low hill, a rich history unfolded. The house, constructed in 1642 by Jno. Briercliffe, bore witness to the turbulent times of the English Civil War, standing as a testament to the ancient lineage of the Briercliffes who had resided there since the Norman Conquest.

Burwains, situated in the Walverden Valley with breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape, held stories that stretched back centuries. The Briercliffes, along with other local families such as the Parkers and Halsteads, remained devoted to their Catholic faith and loyal to the ill-fated Stuart dynasty during the Reformation and the ensuing tumultuous times.

Exploring the halls of Burwains, one could stumble upon a hidden gem—a small room that had once served as a Catholic chapel. The ornate moldings on the ceiling, niches on the walls, and family crests adorning the mantelpiece told tales of the devout faith and heritage of the Briercliffes and Parkers. The house held ancient stone fonts, repurposed in unexpected ways, like one serving as a plant pot in the garden.

While the original sixteenth-century fireplace had been walled up and replaced, remnants of the past still lingered. The dining room showcased a collection of exquisite old English pewter plates and dishes, their gleaming surfaces reminiscent of silver. And on the landing, a finely carved oak cist bore the inscription "M.S., 1666," hinting at a wedding gift bestowed upon Margaret Briercliffe, a descendant of John Briercliffe, upon her marriage to William Sagar of Catlow Hall.

Marriages between the Sagars and the Robertshaws, the present owners of Burwains, were not uncommon throughout history, as evidenced by old documents. One such document, dated 1663, revealed a receipt from Richard Tattersall to his brother-in-law William Sagar, absolving him of financial obligations and showcasing their marks as neither could sign their names.

Delving into the depths of the house, one could discover an intriguing collection of weapons, rusted and weathered, a testament to the times when townships supplied men-at-arms. Burwains served as the repository for Briercliffe, preserving these relics from a bygone era, including rapiers and flint firelocks.

Even the coach-house of Burwains held its own history. It had once been the meeting place for Baptists over a century ago, before the construction of the old chapel at Haggate. The stories whispered within its walls, echoing the faith and struggles of those who sought solace and community.

Amidst the grandeur and antiquity, tales of ordinary life also emerged. An anecdote recounted the mishap of a three-bottle man, returning from Colne Fair in the early morning hours with his wife seated behind him on a pillion. Unbeknownst to him, she had slipped into the brook at Catlow Bottoms. Arriving home, he discovered her absence and sent servants to find her. They discovered her lying in the stream, her head cradled on a sand bed, uttering words that spoke of a different time and place.

The clough that crossed Burwains was bridged by a high wall, where wooden troughs carried water from a spring to the manor house—a far cry from the modern convenience of iron pipes and syphons. History intertwined with innovation as time progressed.

Yet, not all stories held moments of joy. An unfortunate incident occurred during a rush bearing celebration at Holmes Chapel in the early 19th century. A member of the Briercliffe family, fueled by alcohol and rage, engaged in a fatal quarrel with a local farmer. Fleeing from justice, he enlisted as a sailor, serving under Sir John Norris. However, his desertion led him back to Holmes Chapel, where he hid in the woods before being captured and meeting his fate on the gallows in Lancaster.

Despite such tragic events, the Briercliffe family endured. Descendants still lived in the vicinity

of Burnley, carrying on the legacy of their illustrious lineage. John Briercliffe resided in Ashton-under-Lyne, while Mary Ann Briercliffe had married Mr. Jobling, a butcher. Even in America, a descendant of the Briercliffes had lived until about 12 years ago.

Burwains stood as a testament to the rich tapestry of history, a dwelling where generations had lived, loved, and left their mark. Within its walls, stories whispered of faith, love, turmoil, and ordinary moments, intertwining to paint a vivid picture of one of the oldest and most illustrious families in East Lancashire—the Briercliffes of Burwains.

By Donald Jay